

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 292 119

CS 211 096

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TITLE Using Conceptual Analysis in the Classroom: A Writing Process Approach.
PUB DATE [88]
NOTE 16p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Concept Formation; Content Area Writing; *Critical Thinking; Elementary Secondary Education; Group Activities; Interdisciplinary Approach; Problem Solving; Productive Thinking; Student Writing Models; Teaching Methods; Writing for Publication; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS Collaborative Learning; *Conceptual Analysis

ABSTRACT

At a time when many public school teachers and administrators are limiting instructional goals to the lower level objectives found on standardized tests, there is a need for classroom activities derived from higher purposes. Conceptual analysis, which relates abstract concepts to the lives of students, meets this need. While focusing primarily on the composing process, the technique also encourages the use of cooperative learning strategies, critical thinking skills, and interdisciplinary teaming situations. When conducting an analysis of a specified concept, students write six "cases," or stories which exemplify the concept, but without using the concept or term in question. Students writing about the concept of freedom, for example, will write stories illustrating what freedom is, what freedom is not, what freedom may or may not be, what freedom is from a group or individual perspective, and what freedom is from a "science fiction" perspective. As students compose the cases, they list related terms which are later used to form a definition of the concept. Finally, the stories are published, and a presentation is prepared which applies the concept to an issue in the everyday lives of the students. (Six references are appended.) (ARH)

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ED292119

Using Conceptual Analysis in the Classroom:
A Writing Process Approach

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The purposes of this article are; (1) to present a rationale for the use of conceptual analysis in the classroom, (2) to present the objectives of the conceptual analysis unit and, (3) to explain the step-by-step procedures that will insure successful completion of a conceptual analysis unit and provide actual examples of each step.

A Rationale for Using Conceptual Analysis in the Classroom

There has been, within the last few years, a concentrated focus on standardized testing of public school students in the United States. The annual Phi Delta Kappan / Gallup Poll of the "Public's Attitude Toward the Public Schools" reveals that the concept of national testing is favored by almost eight in ten members of the public and that this feeling has enjoyed a consistent level of support over the last fifteen years (Gallup, 1987, p.36).

This concern for standardized testing, which facilitates local, state, and national comparisons, has also done much to increase stress and anxiety among students and school personnel. It is not uncommon for many administrators and teachers to narrow the scope of school curricula to those instructional objectives dictated by respective state boards of education. Many teachers lament that they must, in fact, limit instruction to the point of "teaching the test."

This present situation, one in which classroom procedures are dictated by a mania for standardized

testing, is viewed by many educators as deplorable. It is not that the mandated instructional objectives and testing are inherently to blame. The objectives and required tests are not bad in and of themselves. The problem is found in limiting classroom instruction exclusively to the lower level objectives found on many standardized tests. What must be done is to raise the level of thinking regarding instructional objectives. If instructional objectives and activities are developed that go beyond the scope of those included on standardized tests then it logically follows that those lower level mandates will be satisfied while higher level instruction also takes place. What is needed then are classroom activities derived from higher purposes. The following lessons on "Conceptual Analysis" exemplifies a unit that does just that. It addresses many of state and local mandated instructional objectives while also incorporating critical thinking skills and cooperative learning strategies.

"Conceptual Analysis" is applicable at all grade levels in which students possess basic writing skills and used to relate subject area content to student experience. While focused primarily on the composing process as outlined by Janet Emig (Glatthorn, 1987, pp.317-318), this unit also encourages the use of cooperative learning strategies (Slavin, 1987), critical thinking skills (Sternberg, 1985, pp.45-65), and interdisciplinary teaming situations.

Unit Objectives
Conceptual Analysis : "Freedom"

The objectives included in this unit are that the student:

- * 1. interprets word meanings and patterns of language;
- * 2. interprets instructions;
- * 3. recognizes explicitly stated main ideas, details, sequence of events and cause-effect relationships;
- * 4. recognizes implicitly stated main ideas, details, sequence of events and cause-effect relationships;
- * 5. makes generalizations and draws conclusions;
- * 6. makes predictions and comparisons;
- * 7. recognizes relevance of data;
- 8. uses all punctuation marks and capitalizes words correctly;
- 9. spells words used with accuracy;
- 10. edits and proofreads own writing;
- 11. writes legibly;
- 12. participates in the writing process; prewriting, writing, editing and publishing.

The objectives listed above were selected from the BASIC CURRICULUM CONTENT for Georgia's Public Schools (1987, pp. 30-33). The asterisk (*) denotes those objectives included on the Georgia criterion referenced tests.

Instructional Activities
Conceptual Analysis Unit
"Freedom"

The rationale and objectives of this unit have been presented. The next portion of this exercise involves a general explanation of conceptual analysis and step-by-step procedures necessary for successful completion of the unit. The explanation, procedures, student activities and illustrative examples, taken from the work of eighth grade students at Summerville Middle School, Summerville GA, are as follows:

General Introduction

Conceptual analysis is a tool used to bring clarity and extended meaning to abstract concepts. In the daily workings of my social studies classes, students were often presented with concepts like "equality," "democracy" and "freedom." Problems often arose because it was assumed students inherently were able to grasp the meanings of these concepts or were expected to absorb a definition from the text or dictionary. It became increasingly clear these definition types, while producing a laundry list of words, was essentially inadequate when divorced from student experience. The task then became one of relating these abstract concepts to the lives of students. Conceptual analysis enables us to tap actual student experience and creativity to bring relevance to these otherwise generalized, vague, often unidimensional terms.

Conceptual analysis consists of six "cases," or examples, written in story form of varying length. Often, a half to full page is all that is necessary. The only stipulation, in writing the cases, is that the concept or term in question CANNOT be used in the development of the case. For example, in the Model Case developed for this unit the students were asked to respond to the conceptual question, "What is freedom" without using the term "freedom" at any time in their writing. Using other words in place of "freedom" forces students to consider related words which will be tested later for inclusion in the class definition.

In writing the cases, except for the "Related Concept Case," the students will proceed through the following routine:

DRAFTING;

The students will answer the conceptual question associated with each case. Students may need a starter sentence like "(O)nce upon a time," etc., but emphasis is not placed on writing mechanics. Ideas are important here.

REVISING;

Individually, the students will evaluate the writing of their cases. Then, in small groups, the students will trade papers and evaluate another student's writing. Emphasis here is placed on content, order, sentence structure,

subject / verb agreement, capitalization, spelling and grammar.

EDITING;

Individually, the students will copy the case in its final, revised form. During this stage, the students will also list all the terms or concepts used in place of "Freedom."

Conceptual Analysis Unit: What Is Freedom? Teaching Procedures / Student Activities

Step 1 Prewriting

Individually, the students will write a brief definition of "Freedom," then, in groups assigned by the teacher (see Slavin for cooperative learning information), the students will define selected terms (i.e. concept, analysis, model, contrary, borderline, social, psychological, inventive, related). The written definitions will then be presented to the class. An example of the terms will also be used in a sentence.

Classroom Samples of Prewriting Definitions

Freedom is . . . the ability to make your own choices or decisions.

(Kane Ayres)

. . . the unknown feeling of making ones own choices and / or discussion.

(Rozzie Starr)

Freedom is . . . the right to think and do as you please.

(Christie Cash)

. . . the right to think and speak as you please.

(Christa Whitley)

Step 2 The Model Case

The students will write a Model Case to answer the conceptual question "What is "Freedom?" The only stipulation is that the term "Freedom" cannot be used. The writing process outlined above (drafting, revising, editing) is followed here.

Classroom Samples of the Model Case

Once upon a time in the 19 century, there was a young man by the name of Jimmy Hartline. He was always on the run. He had no supervisor or directions or idols to go by. He had no plans for the future. Until one day he met this girl by the name of Nicole. He admired her because she had made plans for the future

(Renee Blackwell)

Related terms or concepts

no plans
choices
to be your own person

There once lived a man by the name Nathanel Johnson. He lived in a quiet place in Virginia.

One day twelve men came by riding big white horses. They asked him did he here alone? He said, "yes, my wife died five years ago. He did not know the people and that they were planning on building a factory in the same spot as his home. Nathanel could feel something wrong because they were asking too many questions.

About two months later, the men came back and this time they were orderrring him to leave his land

(Vincent Moore)

Related terms or concepts

alone
wrong
not obeying orders

Step 3 The Contrary Case

The students will write a Contrary Case to answer the conceptual question "What is not Freedom?" As in the Model Case, the term "Freedom" cannot be used in the story. The writing process (drafting, revising, editing) is also used in this step.

Classroom Sample of the Contrary Case

There once was a girl named Grace. She was a peasant on a king's land. One day she broke his law, which was "no one shall harvest until I say so." But Grace did it anyway, and a guard caught her. They beat her and through her in the dungeon. That night she weeped. The king yelled down there hush or I shall chop your head off

(Gail Burts)

Related Terms or Concepts

not being fair
no choices
wanting
dungeon

Step 4 The Borderline Case

The student will write a Borderline Case to answer the conceptual question "What may or may not be Freedom?" This case also cannot include the term "Freedom" and, as in the previous steps, the same writing process (drafting, revising, editing) will be followed.

Classroom Samples of the Borderline Case

People are restricted. They are able to do somethings and not others. You are aloud to have your own religion, you can speak what you believe, and you can vote. Then there are things you can't do. For instance stealing, taking drugs, drop school before 16 and killing people

(Kelli Covington)



!!You HAVE THE CHOICE!!

Related terms or concepts

restrictions
choice
responsibility

You're going down the road you're going 95 miles per hour. You fly by a cop, you don't slow down because you know you're caught. Then you see a blue light in your rear-view mirror. You stop. You try to tell the cop that you didn't mean to go that fast, he won't accept it. Then he starts writing you up, and as he finishes he says, "You're allowed 55 miles per hour, how much more do you think you need?"

(Jeff Bennett)

Related terms or concepts

allowed
caught

Step 5 The Social / Psuchological Case

The students will write a Social / Psychological Case to answer the conceptual question "What is Freedom from a group or individual perspective?" The exact context of this case depends on the context of the Model Case. If the

perspective of the Model Case was idiosyncratic, then this case will be written from a group orientation and vice versa. As in the other cases, the students will follow the same writing process (drafting, revising, editing) and cannot use the term "Freedom" in the development of their case.

Classroom Sample of the Social / Psychological Case

Once there was a group of girls. They went everywhere and did everything together as a group. There was this time though that really confused them.

One day they were going on a trip to visit an army base. When they got there on the bus, the girls noticed something strange, everyone else was from another country! When they arrived at the base they noticed that everyone there was from another country too.

Later when they tried to enter with the rest of the visitors, they were denied admittance because they were Americans

(April Ayers)

Related terms or concepts

go anywhere
do anything

Step 6 The Inventive Case

The students will write an Inventive Case to answer the conceptual question "What is Freedom from a 'science fiction' perspective?" This case is used to promote creative thinking and, hopefully, will initiate "boundary blowing" of traditional thinking habits. The students will follow the writing process outlined earlier (drafting, revising, editing) and cannot use the term "Freedom" when writing this case.

Classroom Samples of the Inventive Case

In order to add variety to this unit, the students were assigned to write this case in their writing process groups and instructed to use dialogue in their respective cases.

We live on the planet Sram (Mars) We are going to blow-up Nus. We are going to make countries on the particles left. Our only light is the Noom (Moon). On countries we build we can do anything we want except still and kill.

Ynne - P . . . "Ready to blow up Nus"

No - R . . . "Commence fire"

Eicat - S . . . "Roger"

1-2-3-4-5 . . . "Off Blast" (together)

(Penny Lay, Ron Howard, Stacie Hughes)

Related terms or concepts

anything we want
complete

Zuma and Elicka were female martians. They were obsessed with the idea they that they couldn't go to the "Martinian Male Spa." Let's listen in to their conversation.

Zuma: "My husband is in that spa to the wee hours of the night!"

Elicka: "I wonder what they do, my boyfriend goes to that place too."

Zuma: "Let's try to sneak in and see what it is like."

Elicka: "How are we going to get in?"

(Elena Prather, Erick Housch)

Related terms or concepts

choice
females unable to attend spa

Step 7 The Related Concept Case

This case, also called the "A without B Procedure," involves the "testing" of the terms used in the other cases instead of "Freedom." The conceptual question, "Can we have 'Freedom' without ('X')?" is posed. For example, Can we have "FREEDOM" without (CHOICE)? If any example or situation can be developed without the necessity of choice; then that term ("choice") will not be included in the class definition of the concept. If, on the other hand, no examples or situations excluding a term can be developed; then the term or concept will become part of the class definition. Related terms or concepts from the cases developed in this unit include the following:

1. choice
2. plans
3. being alone
4. leniency
5. dreams
6. pride
7. happiness
8. fairness
9. sadness
10. leaving
11. death
12. disease
13. good health
14. acceptance
15. restrictions
16. rules
17. limitations
18. being wild
19. being comfortable
20. protests
21. suicide
22. responsibility

It should also be noted the teacher will need to plan the careful direction of this step in the conceptual analysis unit. Students may need guidance when developing

generic concepts to represent terms repeated throughout their cases. In the related concepts listed above, for example, the terms "limitations" and "rules" were grouped, with the help of the teacher, under "restrictions." Teacher assistance is also a decisive factor when initiating counter examples eliminating unneeded related terms.

Step 8 The Definition

The terms remaining, after the application of the "A without B Procedure," represent those words comprising the definition of the concept in question. In this case, "Freedom is choice with restriction and responsibility."

Step 9 Publishing

The final writing process will involve the creation of a "Conceptual Analysis Monograph" which includes the unit background information, the edited cases written by the students and the final class definition of the concept. This monograph will be housed in the school library or in the classroom.

Step 10 Developing Relevancy

The final step in this unit involves a presentation using the concept analyzed and applies the class created definition to the everyday lives of the students. The topic of the concluding lesson for this specific unit focused on the restrictions and responsibilities associated with obtaining and keeping a driver's license in Georgia.

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